



**National Assembly, New Assembly Building,
Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul, The Gambia**
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
[HANSARD]

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
THIRD ORDINARY SESSION – THIRD MEETING
THURSDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER, 2020
SESSION – 2020



**National Assembly, New Assembly Building,
Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul, The Gambia
P A R L I A M E N T A R Y D E B A T E S**

[HANSARD]

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Third Meeting of the Third Ordinary Session of the Fifth Assembly
of the Second Republic of The Gambia.

Proceedings of the Sitting of the House on Thursday 17th September, 2020.

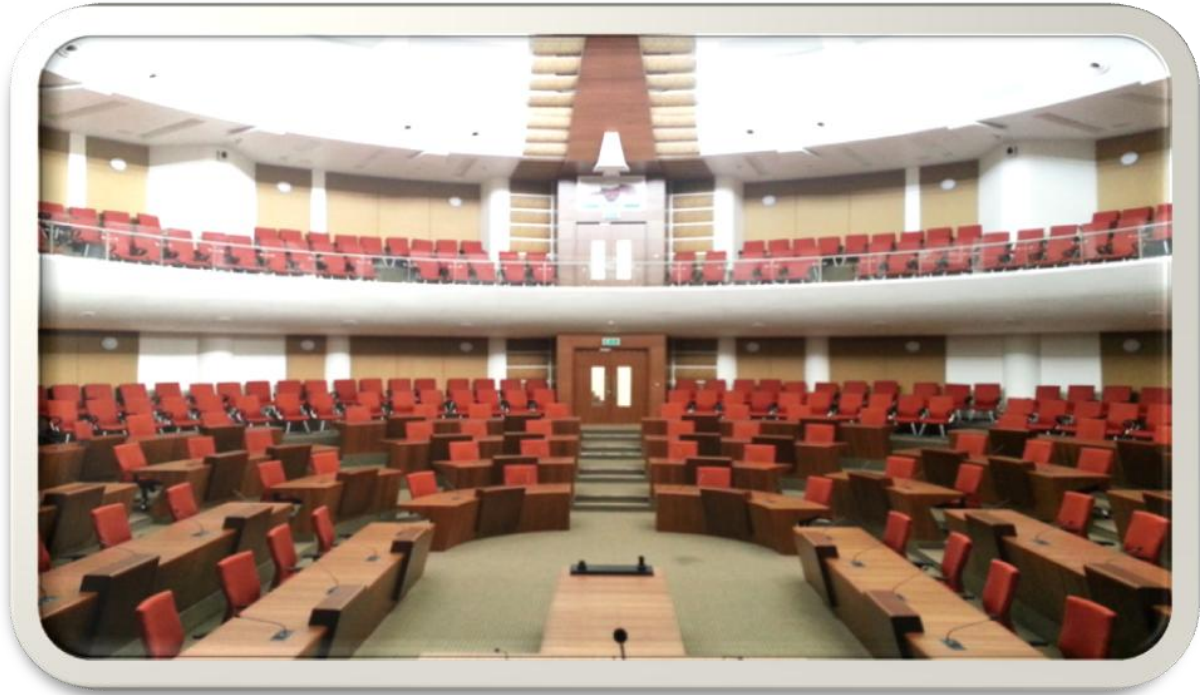
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THE CHAMBERS OF THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY OF THE GAMBIA
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF
THE HOUSE

THIRD ORDINARY SESSION – THIRD MEETING
OF THE FIFTH ASSEMBLY
OF THE SECOND REPUBLIC

THURSDAY 17TH SEPTEMBER, 2020

1. PRAYERS:

[The Speaker, Hon. Mariam Jack Denton, Reads the Prayers].

[The House met at 10:00 a.m. in New Assembly Building, Reginald Pye Lane, Banjul].

[The Speaker, Hon. Mariam Jack Denton, in the Chair].

The House was called to Order

2. Communications from the Chair

THE SPEAKER: Your Excellency, the President of the Republic of The Gambia, Mr. Adama Barrow;

- Your Excellency, The Vice President of the Republic;
- Your Excellencies, Former Vice-Presidents;
- My Lord, the Chief Justice of The Gambia
- Former Hon. Speakers;
- Hon. Ministers herein present;
- Hon. Members of this august Assembly;
- Lord Mayors and Regional Governors;
- Leaders of Political Parties;
- Service Chiefs;
- Venerable Religious Leaders;
- Distinguished Invited guests;
- The Press and Protocol and;
- All other protocols duly observed.

Hon. Members, in accordance with section 77(1) of the 1997 Constitution, and clause 24(1) of the Standing Orders, His Excellency, Mr. Adama Barrow, President of the Republic of The Gambia is here today to attend and address this Sitting of the National Assembly on the Condition of The Gambia, the Policies of the Government and the Administration of the State.

In this regard, I wish to, on behalf of both sides of this Assembly, extend a warm welcome to His Excellency, the President to the National Assembly.

Hon Members, His Excellency's presence in this august Assembly today is significant in our Parliamentary calendar. It will enable Hon Members of the Legislature to have the opportunity to hear from the Head of the Executive [the President] on the Condition of The Gambia, the Policies of the Government and the Administration of the State.

Hon. Members, this year marks the President's Fourth State of the Nation Address to the Fifth Legislature since the inception of the new democratic dispensation. Traditionally, this particular session of the Assembly attracts Gambians and People from all works of life. However, this year's State of the Nation Address will be

conducted in a very unusual manner since we are living in extraordinary times. I have only acted in good faith and conscience to invoke Section 98(2) of the 1997 Constitution and Clause 11(4) of the Standing Orders of the National Assembly, to restrict the admission of strangers into the Public gallery, in line with the general public gathering regulations amid Covid-19.

On that note, I wish to once again welcome His Excellency, the President to the National Assembly in fulfilment of his Constitutional mandate. Thank you.

3. MOTION

STATE OF THE NATION ADDRESS (SoNA) 2020

(BY: H.E. ADAMA BARROW, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA)

THE SPEAKER: I have the singular honour and privilege to invite His Excellency, President Adama Barrow, to deliver his address. Thank you.

...Interruption...

HON. FODAY N.M. DRAMMEH [TUMANA]: Madam Speaker can you please tell the President to put on his mask?

H.E. ADAMA BARROW (PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE GAMBIA):

- Your Excellency, the Vice President;
- Madam Speaker;
- My Lord, the Chief Justice;
- Honourable Secretary General and Head of the Civil Service;
- Honourable Cabinet Members;
- Honourable Members of the National Assembly;
- Lord Mayor of Banjul;
- Members of the Diplomatic and Consular Corps;
- Venerable Religious Leaders; Service Chiefs;
- Senior Government Officials;
- Members of the Media;
- Fellow Gambians;
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

Once again, it is my honour and pleasure to deliver this annual address to the Honourable Members of this August Assembly on my government's performance during the course of the last legislative year. Today, my address presents the successes and challenges of a country that was on a steep rise towards economic boom and socio-political transformation when the unexpected struck. This was the sudden outbreak and rapid spread of the coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic.

It is an address which attempts to dually highlight my government's achievements and the ever-increasing devastation and impact of the pandemic on the economy and life in The Gambia. It is also an address which should be appreciated within the context of a unique, global pandemic and a crisis of tragic consequences. The address highlights a calamity that has dwindled resources, disrupted plans and schedules, and shattered hopes and expectations. This is a crisis that has taken the world by storm, and remains a threat to all nations - rich and poor, big and small.

In The Gambia, the momentum and expectations for rapid progress were evidently very high. Major development projects and achievements closely followed one another, as support and resources were sought and tapped from various sources. The people were politically excited, and my government was optimistic of delivering on our promise of leading the nation to unprecedented economic growth and social regeneration in a democratic haven for all Gambians.

Unfortunately, like other nations, we had to curtail certain economic activities, restrict movement, scale down work schedules and, finally, declare a state of emergency. Economically, key revenue-earning institutions have since been crippled, people grounded and communities adversely affected.

Examples will be cited in my address to show the extent of the impact of the pandemic on the economy and social life, and to indicate its implications on the 2018-2021 National Development Plan (NDP) and, therefore, on our national goals and objectives. Details on sector activities specific to the pandemic will not, however, feature much. The loss of revenue, operational setbacks and missed targets and opportunities are too obvious to require repetition in each sector report.

Let me observe that, important as our development achievements may be, the pandemic and its impact are uniquely more urgent and, consequently, require utmost attention. As a result, I will focus on the pandemic, hopeful that many of my government's infrastructural, legal, institutional and other development successes have been reported widely on the media and other forms of news outlets.

Nevertheless, prompted by the National Constitution, I am obliged to officially report on my government's performance during the course of the last legislative year. Against this background, concise reports on the various sectors follow. I will begin

with the Finance and Economic Affairs sector, as our development strength is derived from it.

❖ **Finance and Economic Affairs**

Madam Speaker, The Gambia has been experiencing a slowdown of economic growth due to the reduction of economic activities, as a direct result of the COVID-19 pandemic. An initial analysis shows that GDP growth rates this year could decline from six percent (6%) to two percent (2%). The decline in import volumes and economic activities will correspondingly lead to shortfalls in import duties and other tax revenues. Based on the current situation, an estimated twenty percent (20%) of expected revenue will be lost. The total estimated fiscal impact from the decline in import duties and other tax revenues is Two Billion, Three Hundred Thousand Million Dalasis (D2.3 Billion); that is, 2.4 percent of GDP. The Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs (MoFEA) projects that the fiscal deficit will widen from 1.5 percent of GDP to 2.1 percent of GDP.

The pandemic has negatively impacted on budget execution as approved by the National Assembly. The Government had to resort to cuts and reallocation of funds from line items, such as travel, training and workshops, into much needed areas. These decisions were taken to set aside Five Million Dalasis (D500 Million) as emergency funds to cater for prevention, containment and response to the pandemic. Certain budget line expenditures have been reallocated to the Ministry of Health for COVID-19-related expenditures. This decision has affected almost all Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs). MoFEA was forced to make further budget cuts in the face of declining revenue in recent months and the expected loss of revenue for the rest of the year.

With declining revenues and the need to provide humanitarian assistance and support businesses during this period of economic downturn, Government is faced with a challenging task for the coming months. The Covid-19 pandemic will continue to have a significant socio-economic impact on the economy both directly and indirectly; directly, through the effects of the disease on production, investment and trade within the country, and between The Gambia and the rest of the world. Indirectly, the

impact will be felt through the slowing of global economic growth, supply chain disruptions and, by extension, negatively impacting The Gambia's growth prospects.

There is an imminent threat of a global recession arising from the pandemic, and the extent of this impact is yet to be fully determined. No matter what the impact will be, Government has already devised post-pandemic plans to protect lives and livelihoods

❖ **Interior**

Madam Speaker, in collaboration with other services, The Gambia Police Force has increased engagement in community and border patrols. However, border enforcement activities on irregular migrants and perpetrators of Transnational Organised Crimes, such as Trafficking and Smuggling, have been constrained due to the advent of COVID-19. To compound the challenges, key components of the ongoing Security Sector Reform; namely, the third phase of the German Support Training Programme and the institutional policy drafting process, have been halted. With regard to revenue earnings, in 2019, the Immigration Department generated One Hundred and Thirty-Nine Million, Six Hundred and Seventy-Two Thousand, Eight Hundred and Forty Dalasis (D139, 672,840.00).

However, it is predicted that collection for 2020 is likely to drop severely due to the pandemic. Similarly, the production and issuance of National Identity Cards, biometric passports and other official documents were postponed. The result was a huge loss of revenue for the sector.

The Prison Department has not been spared, especially in connection with training on life skills and rehabilitation programmes for adult inmates. These programmes are important for the effective reintegration of prisoners after their discharge from prison.

Furthermore, due to the prevailing situation, staff of various sections, such as fire-fighters, had to be redeployed as frontline officers for COVID-19 intervention exercises countrywide. This has created capacity gaps in the execution of other duties and programme implementation. Construction works, for example, and expansion of service programmes have ceased until further notice.

The Drug Law Enforcement Agency is facing serious challenges arising from the pandemic. They have limited operational capacity, and this could increase the rate of

undetected drug abuse. Prison decongestion, as a response measure to contain Covid-19, has compelled the release, on bail, of most remand prisoners as well as the pardoning of some convicts. In addition, court hearings were initially suspended to avoid an overcrowded remand wing.

❖ **Defence**

Madam Speaker, The Gambia depends on the Armed and Security Forces to protect the sovereignty of the nation, while maintaining peace, security and stability in the country. In responding to the call to duty, The Gambia Navy has intensified routine sea patrols to enforce the law and ensure the security of our borders and the territorial integrity of the nation. Besides their routine work, the Armed Forces have been actively involved in civil duties that include collaboration with other services and agencies to secure and distribute Relief Food Items countrywide. In addition, their Ordinance Unit has been producing face masks to protect troops against coronavirus infection. We are proud that the Forces' Public Relations Department produced a COVID-19 sensitisation video that won an International Award from the Global Youth Leaders Network in South Africa.

At present, some medical service personnel of the Armed Forces have been deployed to Public Health Emergency Centres to support frontline health workers. We appreciate their sacrifice.

❖ **Office of the Vice President**

Madam Speaker, The Office of the Vice President has a number of institutions under its purview. I will begin with the National Nutrition Agency (NaNA) and, like all other sectors, my address will leave out details on COVID-19. As contained in the validated National Nutrition Policy 2018 - 2025, NaNA continues to pursue the goal of attaining optimal nutritional requirements for the Gambian population. The objective is to safeguard healthy and sustainable livelihoods and to render The Gambia free from malnutrition. Their major achievements during the year under review include drafting of a Nutrition Bill 2020 and implementation of the Thirty-One Million Dollar (US\$31 Million) Social Safety Net Project, funded by the Government of The Gambia and the World Bank. NaNA is implementing this project in collaboration with other stakeholders. The project targets rural households in the West Coast, North Bank,

Central River, Upper River and Lower River Regions. The objective is to improve the coordination of activities and provide temporary social assistance.

In the context of COVID-19, the project aims to provide a quick response support (Nafa Quick) to approximately eighty thousand (80,000) households with a four-month cash transfer of One Thousand, Five Hundred Dalasis (D1500.00) per month in thirty (30) districts. In addition, the EU, through UNICEF, supported the Agency with funding to provide a one-off payment of One Thousand, Five Hundred Dalasis (D1500.00) to five thousand, nine hundred and fifty-one (5951) beneficiaries, representing about ninety-nine percent (99%) of the targeted six thousand (6000) beneficiaries of the BReST Project. The support is to contribute to the food and nutrition security of children of the former BReST beneficiaries.

Madam Speaker, apart from other duties, the National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) has been involved in coordinating my government's food assistance for over eighty-four percent (84%) of households in the country. The distribution was successfully completed as planned. Together with other stakeholders, the NDMA has developed a roadmap for Post-COVID-19 on building resilience in the four key areas of Health Response, Social Protection, Socioeconomic recovery mechanisms and the Rule of Law. As regards this rainy season, the NDMA has engaged stakeholders and UN partners to respond to any disaster.

❖ **Environment, Climate Change and Natural Resources**

Madam Speaker, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, the management, protection and conservation of our environment and natural resources, which involves addressing the threat of climate change, have been major priorities of my government. As the environment and natural resources continue to depreciate, we are determined to reduce the high dependency on them, and prevent their destruction and depletion respectively. The implementation of the Large-scale Ecosystem-based Adaptation (EBA) Project, which is a Twenty-Five-Million US-Dollar (US\$ 25 Million) project funded by the Green Climate Fund, through the United Nation Environment Programme, is on-going. EBA is aimed at restoring degraded forests and agricultural landscapes with climate-resilient plant species that provide goods for consumption or

sale. It also seeks to facilitate commercially viable natural resource-based businesses to be managed by community-based organisations.

In the area of renewable energy supply to improve national electricity supply, the OMVG energy project is at an advanced stage. Work on the two sub-stations is nearing completion, and the installation of electric poles in project areas is progressing steadily. As waste management presents a major environment challenge for the country, the Waste Management Bill is under review to deal with waste issues.

❖ **Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment**

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, Government, through the Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment (MoTIE), is dedicated to improving the business environment, promoting private sector investment and supporting Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). The purpose is to develop trade and create employment openings, in addition to strengthening bilateral and multilateral cooperation within the context of private sector development as an engine of economic growth. The Ministry has now completed the review of the Labour Act 2007, and a draft Bill has been developed. The Bill seeks to strengthen industrial relations in the country by ensuring the efficient functioning of the labour market.

Currently, the sector is building an Employment Service Centre to facilitate linkages between job seekers and employers. The construction works of the Centre commenced in 2019, and are due for completion this year. Earlier in the year, the Ministry completed the framework for Bread regulation to enforce the Essential Commodities Act. This relates to the production and distribution of quality bread in the country. The regulation was signed and gazetted in February, 2020. Through GIEPA and support from the Commonwealth Secretariat, Ministry of trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment has begun reviewing the National Export Strategy 2013. The activity began in October 2019, and completion of the new National Export Strategy, 2020-2024 is expected to end soon. The review of the National Employment Policy and its Action Plan is complete, and a validated draft Policy and Action Plan are near finalisation.

Madam Speaker, in the area of investment promotion, the Government has amended the GIEPA Act 2015 to maximise public engagement and benefits in key priority

sectors. The amended Act will now help to widen the scope of domestic taxes and reduce over-reliance on trade taxes. In another development, Government is strengthening collaboration with the private sector through the National Business Council, which is now fully operational. The Council has adopted an Action Plan to implement short and medium-term key business climate reform measures. These measures are implemented and monitored by the Doing Business Taskforce established in 2019. The reform is modelled to strengthen the private sector by improving business conditions and removing barriers to competitive job-creating industries.

Besides policy reform, GIEPA is devoted to furthering investment promotion programmes to attract private sector investments into The Gambia. In the last two quarters of 2019, four Special Investment Certificates (SIC) were issued. They have a combined investment potential of Twenty-Eight Million, Eight and Ten Thousand US Dollars (US\$ 28,810,000) and a combined employment potential of over five hundred (500) workers. On Small and Medium Enterprises and entrepreneurship development, through the Entrepreneurship and Private Sector Development Project, capacity building has been intensified for youth and women entrepreneurs. Two hundred and seventy (270) youths have been trained on marketable skills, and one hundred and forty-four (144) persons were trained to improve their entrepreneurial skills. Concurrently, the sector is working with eighty (80) SheTrades companies to support women to improve their production capacity and the quality and packaging of their products.

The Youth Empowerment Project and Tekki Fii remain very useful in supporting MSMEs and youth development initiatives. In 2019, a total of eighty-five (85) MSMEs, two hundred and thirteen (213) youths and one hundred and sixteen (116) entrepreneurs were supported. The YEP project was able to create nine hundred and twenty-eight (928) new jobs, and one hundred and thirty-two (132) jobs were sustained. Currently, three grants; namely: YEP Minigrant, Tekki Fii Solar grant and the Agro-Grant, continue to provide financial support to young entrepreneurs.

Madam Speaker, at the regional level, The Gambia maintains its position to participate effectively in the African Continental Free Trade Area negotiations, following its adoption in May 2019. Negotiations at the ECOWAS level to agree on the sensitive

and exclusion lists in the 'trade in goods' negotiations are almost complete. Trade-in Services negotiations, under the AfCFTA, started in 2019. However, they have been suspended due to the threat posed by the pandemic.

Ministry of trade, Industry, Regional Integration and Employment led the national consultations, and drafted The Gambia's Schedules of Specific commitments for the 'services negotiations.' The draft schedules have been shared with ECOWAS for arrangements to prepare the ECOWAS requests and offers in these areas. A quick assessment conducted by the Ministry, in partnership with The Gambia Bureau of Statistics on the labour market, reveals that job loss is estimated at fifty-two thousand, seven hundred and fifty-two (52,752) employed people in both the formal and informal sectors as a result of the lockdown. This will worsen the already high unemployment rate of 35.2%, as reported in 2018.

The Entrepreneurship and Private Sector Development Project, funded by UNDP, has equally redirected a significant sum of its allocated budget to the fight against COVID-19. Thus, targets for investment promotion will be constrained this year.

❖ **Foreign Affairs, International Cooperation and Gambians Abroad**

Madam Speaker, as expected, the pandemic has adversely impacted on the Foreign Service operations of The Gambia. Similar to other sectors, part of the funds allocated for programme implementation in the Foreign Service sector was diverted, resulting in the inability to implement some of the programmes that were approved. The pandemic coincided with my government's decision to downsize the Foreign Service through the closure of some diplomatic missions and recall of diplomatic personnel on the basis of executing a Staff Monitored Programme. As a result of the global lockdown, the exercise has been stalled. This has negative financial implications for Government.

To complicate matters further, development cooperation activities at the international level have been disrupted. Joint Commissions with bilateral partners and major international conferences scheduled for 2020 have been postponed. Agreed programmes with partners and the volume of assistance expected from development partners could not materialise as planned. In short, funds for development cooperation were diverted to national emergency funds to combat the pandemic.

❖ **Lands, Regional Government, NGO and Religious Affairs**

Madam Speaker, the conflict over Land and Natural Resources (LNR) Project has been put on hold by FAO. This Project is meant to strengthen the legal framework for land and natural resource-related conflict resolution and governance. It is designed as well to enhance mechanisms for conflict prevention in communities where LNR-related violence has occurred, and to support peace building efforts. The manual for LNR has already been developed. I will seize this opportunity to stress that recent land ownership conflicts stirred by individual interests have been noted by my government. Having inherited most of them, I reassure those affected that my government is working to ensure that the rule of law and justice prevail. The ultimate goal is to sustain peace so that we can focus on development and live together peacefully.

Madam Speaker, economic activities within this sector have decreased. As a result, revenue collection has reduced. Whereas, for example, from January to March 2020, Eight Million, One Hundred and Forty-Eight Thousand, One Hundred and Forty-Three Dalasis (D8, 148, 143.00) was realised, representing a monthly average of Two Million, Seven Hundred and Sixteen Thousand and Forty-Seven Dalasis (D2, 716, 047). The figures dropped during the Covid-19 period. The Department of Community Development, under the Ministry of Lands, is now implementing participatory demand-driven community development strategies to enhance decentralised structures and support Community-Based Organizations. All these initiatives are geared towards reducing poverty and facilitating sustainable socioeconomic development for all. To this end, plans are underway to present the NGO Bill before this august body.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members, in spite of all the challenges relative to the pandemic, the Ministry signed an MOU with Helping Hand Foundation in Belgium to provide funding of about Five Million Dalasis (D5 Million) for over twenty communities and capacity building training on management and enterprise development. On the other hand, the 2020 challenge, which was expected to generate over Ten Million Dalasis (D10 Million) has been cancelled. This has blocked the implementation of community projects valued at Ten Million Dalasis (D10 Million). Responding to the needs of out-of-school youths, support is provided for women and youth to acquire life and livelihood skills. The aim is to expand employment opportunities for them. The

recently launched Ecosystem-based Adaptation Project will further support this initiative in LRR, CRR and URR. Unfortunately, the skills and capacity building training for a target-group of five thousand (5000) youths and women has been stalled. A total of over Two Million, Five Hundred Thousand Dalasis (D2.5 Million) has been lost by these entrepreneurs due to the lockdown.

To end on a positive note, the Department of Community Development has initiated the formulation of a national community development policy.

❖ **Agriculture**

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Agriculture is one of the most important sectors in the country, as many Gambians are either occupational farmers or depend on farming for subsistence. To increase production, therefore, the Ministry of Agriculture has been active in policy development and programme implementation. To cite examples, it has developed a National Agricultural Extension Policy to promote production and value addition, value chain development, strengthening the agricultural extension system and building partnerships. Among other instruments that drive agricultural service delivery is the National Horticulture Sector Strategy, which supports the objectives of modernising agriculture in The Gambia. A Cooperative Policy (2019) to revitalise cooperative principles and values has now been conceived. Likewise, a Bill on Plant Health Protection has been initiated to support the establishment of a modern plant protection organisation.

Parallel to this is the Animal Health Bill 2020, prepared to effectively regulate veterinary services in the country. In its transformation process, the Ministry also prioritises small ruminant improvement and the control and eradication of pests. With reference to inputs, eleven thousand (11,000) metric tonnes of fertiliser are available for sale, whilst fifty (50) metric tonnes of groundnut seeds have been provided to farmers on loan, repayable from their produce. As additional support, varieties of certified seeds have also been distributed to them. Furthermore, after twenty-three years, arrangements have been finalised to revive cotton production in the country, with assurance of a market in Senegal.

In preparation for the 2020 rainy season, Government distributed various items of machinery and equipment to our farmers nationwide. They include a good number of

tractors, power tillers, milling machines, pumping Machines and other agricultural inputs. With the support of the National Assembly, especially its Select Committee on Agriculture, an extra One Hundred Million Dalasis (D100 Million) has been budgeted for farming implements, equipment, disease control mechanisms, livestock and poultry production and seed production, among other interventions. It is a welcome development that an Emergency Response Plan has been set in motion in collaboration with the World Food Programme. About twenty-two thousand and seventy-three (22,073) highly vulnerable households and roughly sixty-nine thousand, four hundred and ninety-nine (69,499) food insecure households will benefit from this arrangement.

Still on developments in this sector, the Ministry of Agriculture is encouraging private business enterprises. Plans are afoot, for instance, to grant Marro Farms a revolving fund of Ten Million Dalasis (D10 Million) as microfinance to boost production. Marro Farms is already active in the Pacharr fields. Having validated the second Gambia National Investment Programme, this year, the Ministry plans to build facilities across the country to reduce post-harvest losses.

We are thankful to the Chinese and Japanese Governments, together with all our development partners, for supporting the sector.

❖ **Petroleum and Energy**

Madam Speaker, the uncertainty caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the suspension of the planned drilling exploration by FAR-PETRONAS. Hence drilling has been rescheduled from end of the year, 2020 to 2021. Similarly, British Petroleum's drilling activities will commence in 2021. Due to low demand, the prices of petroleum products have fallen. To mitigate the anticipated impact, my government has ensured that both heavy and light fuel will be made available country-wide. Through the on-going structural and legislative reforms, Government will table a Bill to create an autonomous Petroleum Commission to further strengthen the regulatory landscape and guarantee regulatory independence for the upstream activities of the sector.

Madam Speaker, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, in collaboration with our partners, the Government has undertaken a number of important projects and programmes in this sector, which have been hampered by the pandemic. These

include: the National Electricity Access Projects; the ECOWAS and AfDB-supported Projects; the one thousand, one hundred (1100) schools and health facilities solar project, and the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Installations projects, among others. The Mining Sector is a driving force for employment and availability of raw materials for the construction industry. Nonetheless, we have been mindful of regulating it. Based on the regulations for precious minerals, five special mining licenses have been granted. To avoid depleting our sand resources, licences are now issued for inland sand mining. Exploitation of sand offshore is being considered. These issues will be captured in the proposed Minerals and Mining Policy that will be developed and tabled before this august Assembly.

❖ **Fisheries and Water Resources**

Madam Speaker, Fisheries is a key revenue earner for The Gambia. I am happy to report that from September 2019 to-date, the sector generated total revenue of One Hundred and Seventy-Eight Million, Seven Hundred and Ten Thousand and Six Hundred and Eight Dalasis (D178,710,608.00) from industrial fishing operations. This was earned through the EU-Gambia Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement, fishing licenses, fines and fish landings.

During the period under review, the industrial fisheries sub-sector created employment for one thousand and thirty-six (1036) Gambian youths, mainly as fisheries observers and deckhands on board industrial fishing vessels. To reduce the economic impact of the pandemic on small scale operators in the fishing industry, the suspension on night fishing has been deferred from 1st August to 30th November, 2020. Turning to the water sub-sector, regular water monitoring through sampling and purification are important activities for access to clean water. The Department of Water Resources has intensified such activities through support from development partners and partner institutions.

Under the Government of The Gambia and UNICEF Country Programme of Cooperation, support is extended to schools and health facilities. Sanitation facilities have been provided for five (5) schools and water supply systems for six (6) lower and upper basic schools across four regions of the country. 6. In addition, construction and rehabilitation of water supply systems in five (5) health facilities, and

provision of adequate sanitation facilities for the health facilities in Basse and Diabugu, have been accomplished.

Madam Speaker, the Department of Water Resources, in partnership with UNICEF, has started the process of procuring essential substances and equipment, including water storage facilities, to improve on water testing, purification and distribution. These will improve water supply and sanitation activities, particularly in rural communities. Earlier this year, in collaboration with other stakeholders, the Ministry handed over twenty-seven (27) solar-powered water supply systems within the five regions of the country. Forty-seven (47) communities, with a combined population of over fifty thousand (50,000) rural dwellers, now benefit from this project. This was achieved through the Saudi Sahelian Project Phase Five (5).

❖ **Youth and Sports**

Madam Speaker, my government attaches special importance to the Youth and Sports sector. In this regard, the validated Youth Policy (2019-2028) will soon guide the development programmes for Gambian youths. The National Sports Policy (2010-2019) and the Strategic Plan (2015-2019), which were the main policy instruments for the Youth and Sports sector, are now the focus of a terminal review, leading to the development of successor frameworks. In support of the sector, the Government has approved the Youth and Sports Development Levy to generate a responsive development roadmap linked to the NDP. It is planned that a compulsory National Youth Service, targeting fresh university graduates, will be implemented this year. The Youth and Sports Development Fund will be launched, and programme implementation will begin whenever the threat of the pandemic subsides.

Madam Speaker, the National Youth Service Scheme was able to recruit six hundred and two (602) youths. All of them have been placed for skills acquisition in various areas. Most of them were either employed or are self-employed. Another one hundred and fifty (150) youths are now on placement at various skills centres or other institutions. Aside from other significant programmes, the PIA has successfully implemented the Community Development Initiative in thirty-five (35) communities across the regions. Two thousand, four hundred and twenty-two (2,422) youths participated in the award programme, and six hundred and ninety-nine (699) young

people have completed their awards. From February 2015 to date, through The Gambia Songhai Initiative Project, about two hundred and eighty (280) youths have been trained in Agribusiness and value addition. The indication is that they have either been engaged or are self-employed.

In the area of sports, The Gambia has been doing very well in various international events. Once the threat of the pandemic ends, Government's encouragement and support to step up sports and recreation will resume. Connected to this, in an endeavour to expand accommodation for both the tourist and sports industries, the sector is working towards upgrading the Friendship Hostel to a three-star hotel at an estimated cost of Thirty-Five Million (D35 Million). To update their policy instruments, the Ministry of Youth and Sports will formulate a National Sports Policy for 2020-2029 and a strategic plan. Once developed, they will be brought before this august body for approval.

❖ **Arts, Tourism and Culture**

Madam Speaker, since the change of Government in 2017, the Arts and Culture subsectors have been boosted in relation to participation and investment. I am happy, to report that in February 2020, The Gambia submitted its Periodic Report on the UNESCO 2008 Convention on Cultural Expressions, which The Gambia signed in 2011. The report was adopted by the UNESCO sub-committee on the Convention. The door is now open for The Gambia creative industries to benefit from the UNESCO International Fund for Cultural Diversity.

In the year under review, the National Council for Arts and Culture benefitted from, and successfully executed, a grant from the UNESCO Country Participation programme to train twenty-four (24) Gambian youths on entrepreneurship in the creative industries. To further my government's policy to promote rural and eco-tourism, plans are underway to construct a forty-bedroom four-star Eco-Lodge at Fort Bullen on the North Bank. This will be the first of its kind in rural Gambia. The Gambia Tourism Board intends to construct four similar facilities in each Region. These facilities are expected to create job opportunities to the rural youth and trigger in-country tourism.

Let me add that through the European Union funded Youth Empowerment Project (YEP), a three-year project on Youth and the Creative Industries has been launched to facilitate capacity building and funding for youths who are active in the media arts, fashion, music and audiovisual enterprises. The project is planned to begin later this year. When all these programmes are linked with those mentioned earlier, it will become evident that the Government is serious about addressing the plight of our youth, specially by reducing unemployment. We encourage the youth to make the most of these opportunities.

❖ **Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology**

Madam Speaker, the tertiary and higher education sector is focused on its mandate of human capital development, most particularly, through training, research and education at tertiary and higher levels. Accordingly, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology currently sponsors one thousand and sixty-one (1061) students in The University of The Gambia, thirty-one percent (31%) of them are female. Six hundred more students are sponsored at The Gambia Technical Training Institute (GTTI), The Gambia College and the Management Development Institute (MDI). Additionally, over six hundred and eighty-seven (680) students are on studies abroad through awards granted by various countries, such as the People's Republic of China, Cuba, India, Malaysia and Morocco. We are thankful to all the countries, institutions and organisations that continue to award scholarships to Gambian students.

At present, the Ministry of Higher Education is closely supervising the on-going construction of The University of The Gambia Faraba Banta Campus. At the same time, efforts are being made to continue works for the establishment of the Ndemban Skills Centre, under the proposed programme of one Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) centre in each Administrative Region. Through this programme, the refurbished Julangel Skills Centre will continue offering classes to the communities of URR. In the LRR, the refurbished Mansa-Konko GTTI-Annex continues to deliver related courses.

In a bid to transforming the tertiary and higher education sector for the provision of higher quality education and training, four Bills will be submitted for tabling by this

August Assembly. 8. These are: The Gambia University of Science, Engineering and Technology Bill (2020), The National Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority Bill (2020), The University of The Gambia Bill (2020) and The Gambia Institute for Public Administration and Management Bill (2020). The Bills spell out arrangements to transform GTTI and MDI into degree awarding institutions. Through the arrangements, a variety of new courses will be offered, with TVET accorded more attention to address the skills gaps within the Gambian workforce. The respective Schools of The Gambia College will be indexed into The University of The Gambia, and teachers will be trained from diploma to higher levels. Also finalised is the 2020-2024 Tertiary and Higher Education Sector Strategic Plan. The Plan caters for educational continuity, with contingency measures for unforeseen circumstances.

Last, but not the least, my government has initiated a Stimulus Package for Gambia Government sponsored and non-sponsored students studying abroad. It is a contribution towards their sustenance during these difficult times. In collaboration with the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology is administering this package on behalf of Government.

❖ **Basic and Secondary Education**

Madam Speaker, I will focus on the pandemic to lament how it has undermined efforts to educate our children. As we all know, schools were closed nationwide for months, which directly affected about 674,300 children. The loss of instructional hours arising from this threatens the attainment of the annual target of eight hundred and eighty (880) hours of instruction time. We applaud the sector for intervening to keep the students at home and delivering lessons on radio, television and other social media platforms.

In particular, we commend the Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education (MoBSE), together with The Gambia Teacher's Union and partners, for providing about five hundred (500) solar-powered transistor radio sets to deprived households in URR, CRR, LRR and NBR. This has enabled children in those households to follow lessons delivered for them. It is regrettable that the National Assessment Tests could not be conducted this year due to the pandemic, since the targeted grades were not in

school. However, it is gratifying to indicate that The Gambia Basic Education Certificate Examination (GABECE) and the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) have been conducted successfully. Failure to have conducted these terminal examinations would have had serious implications for transition at the basic and secondary school levels.

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, to recover the lost time, the basic and secondary education sector is considering the extension of time spent in school; stepping up double-shift arrangements; intensifying and extending lessons for all the grades; rescheduling examinations, and adjusting curriculum delivery schemes. 6. We thank the World Bank, UNICEF, WFP, MRC Holland Foundation, GTU, the Local Education Group and all other partners, groups and individuals for their support to the education sector.

❖ **Transport, Works and Infrastructure**

Madam Speaker, I will begin on a high note to state that during the period under review, important road and building projects in the North Bank Region and the Greater Banjul Area were completed and inaugurated, as covered by the media. The remaining projects embarked upon are progressing very well, except that their completion dates will change, as most contractors have scaled down their work schedules.

Turning to the transport subsector, it is interesting that the Port of Banjul registered growth during the first quarter of 2020, compared to the corresponding period of 2019. The volume of cargo handled during this period increased by 8.3 per cent to eight hundred and fourteen thousand, six hundred and ninety-three (814,693) metric tonnes. Container volumes increased by 5.4 per cent from thirty-two thousand, three hundred and eighty-nine (32,389) in 2019 to thirty-four thousand, two hundred and thirty (34,230) in 2020. However, due to the general decline in trading activities, container delivery, in terms of daily gate output, is lower than the average of two hundred (200). The closure of the Trans-Gambia Ferry Service and the scaling down of ferry services have severely affected revenue generation, with up to sixty percent (60%) loss in daily collection. It must be observed that the real impact of the

lockdown is likely to be felt later. Until now, this subsector has been a remarkable revenue earner.

Madam Speaker, the Maritime division has registered a big drop in revenue collection, when compared to the fourth quarter of 2019. Revenue collected from licensing fees dropped from Two Million, Four Hundred Thousand Dalasis (D2.4 Million) during the fourth quarter of 2019 to about One Million, Five Hundred Thousand (D1.5 Million) in the first quarter of 2020. Another setback on revenue collection is the stoppage of the levy on freight. Overall, revenues on freight levy dropped by Three Hundred Thousand Dalasis (D300, 000.00) from, approximately, Five Million Dalasis (D5 Million) during the fourth quarter of 2019. The global impact for the first quarter of 2020 is about Five Million, One Hundred and Twenty-Nine Thousand Dalasis (D5,129,000), and this difference is likely to increase in the months ahead. The decline in tours and travels has slowed down the aviation industry. The Industry is experiencing huge revenue loss, which may persist until November, 2020. The Gambia International Airline alone is projected to make a total loss of about Five Million, Six Hundred Thousand US Dollars (US\$ 5.6 Million) by October 2020.

To sum it up, COVID-19 has disrupted the operations and services of the Transport, Works and Infrastructure sector, which will surely have a serious, negative impact on the economy.

❖ **Health**

Madam Speaker, my government, through the Ministry of Health, remains steadfast and dedicated to providing affordable and quality health care services, particularly in times of hardship or calamities. Reacting to the coronavirus pandemic, for example, the Ministry of Health developed a comprehensive Preparedness and Response Plan. It focuses, among other areas, on scaling-up and strengthening support, coordination, surveillance, case management, communication and logistics. With support from the Global Fund, the National Public Health Laboratory has been refurbished and upgraded to a Biological Safety Level Three laboratory. Now, it tests for COVID-19, which was done, in the past, solely by the Medical Research Council-Gambia. The former Ndemban Clinic and the Sanatorium are ready for use as centres to treat COVID19 patients, if necessary. I must add that plans are underway to construct eight

permanent treatment centres, and refurbish other isolation centres across the country. Also, with support from the World Bank, a new National Emergency Treatment Centre and a Training Centre will be established to respond to emergency cases.

Madam Speaker, in line with the National Health Financing Policy (2017-2030) and the National Health Financing Strategic Plan (2018-2024), the introduction of a National Health Insurance Scheme, for the first time in this country, is at an advanced stage. The draft Bill on the scheme is ready for review by Cabinet. Focusing attention on other legal frameworks, the National Health Policy (2012-2020) and the National Health Sector Strategic Plan (2014-2020) will expire this year. Consequently, a new health policy and strategic plan will be developed for the sector. On maternal and child health services, my government is committed to the reduction of under-five and maternal mortality. In the interim, significant gains have been registered recently for both infant mortality and under-five mortality. Equally, deliveries conducted by skilled birth attendants in health facilities have increased. 9. The Gambia is determined to provide free immunisation services to all children in the country. As evidence, this year, my government contributed Thirty-Two Million Dalasis (D32,000,000. 00) towards immunisation services.

Madam Speaker, Members of this August Assembly, The Gambia is one of the few countries in Africa that have successfully piloted the use of the HPV vaccine. The vaccine reduces the risk factors of girls and women from contracting HPV, which has a strong link with the deadly Cervical Cancer. As part of efforts to implement the concept of Primary Health Care in the country, and to strengthen healthcare services at the basic level, Primary Healthcare Villages have increased by 12%, from six hundred and thirty-four (634) to seven hundred and twenty-two (722). Our collaboration with Riders for Health has been very useful in the realisation of these successes, noting that they have procured a fleet of new ambulances, motorcycles and other vehicles for the health sector.

While appreciating this partnership, I thank all the operatives within the sector, including MRC-Gambia, for risking their lives to serve as foot soldiers against the deadly coronavirus. Thank you all for the noble sacrifice!

❖ **Justice**

Madam Speaker, the Government remains committed to its promise and desire of upholding good governance, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. In this direction, our plan was to complete the building blocks of the legal sector reform agenda in 2020. With regret, however, due to the advent of Covid-19, delaying the finalisation of the legislative reforms is unavoidable. Consistent with the Truth, Reconciliation and Reparations Commission (TRRC) Act, the TRRC is on course to completing its two-year mandate by the end of 2020. In January 2020, the Commission submitted their interim report to the Government, highlighting the activities they undertook in their first year of operations. They have promised to complete their work as scheduled. In March 2020, the Constitutional Review Commission submitted the final draft Constitution. The new Constitution Bill 2020 was gazetted, and tabled before the National Assembly after the three-month period stipulated by law. Following the tabling of the Anti-Corruption Bill at the National Assembly, we expect that it will be enacted during this legislative session. In consequence, the first ever National Anti-Corruption Commission is expected to be established before the end of 2020.

The pandemic has prevented the enactment of a number of Bills; but, to complete the legislative reforms started in 2017, seventeen (17) Bills are ready for enactment during this legislative year. They include twelve Amendment Bills, the Skin Bleaching (Prohibition) Repeal Bill, 2020 and four (4) new Bills. These are the Criminal Offences Bill 2020, the Criminal Procedure Bill 2020, the Prevention and Prohibition of Torture Bill 2020 and the International Crimes Bill 2020.

Madam Speaker, over the years, my government embarked on the task of restoring confidence in the Judiciary and safeguarding speedy dispensation of justice in the country. To realise these objectives, we have succeeded in staffing the High Courts adequately. Through the Office of the Chief Justice, for instance, the Government appointed additional Judges during the period under review. Most of them are Gambians. This is a result of our resolve to staff the Courts with competent Gambians. Following the measures enforced to prevent coronavirus infections, it was necessary to suspend court proceedings throughout the country. Upon resuming work, the Courts had to scale down sittings. However, to speed up justice delivery, two Virtual

Courts were set up in the High Court to deal with applications for bail and other urgent matters.

We thank the UNDP for supporting this initiative. It is planned that the use of ICT will be rolled out to the Magistrates Courts as a permanent feature to improve efficiency. A new High Court now operates at Mile 7, Bakau. This new facility accommodates a Judge of the High Court and staff. Sessions have already begun, bringing justice closer to the people. Another High Court operates within the Bundung Magistrates Court premises, with a Judge presiding over cases there. Further still, a resident High Court Judge in the URR presides over cases in CRR, LRR and NBR. The purpose is to facilitate speedy disposal of cases in the rural area.

❖ **Information and Communication Infrastructure**

Madam Speaker, COVID-19 has affected the ICT sector equally hard, leading to programme and project implementation delays. By extension, it has negatively impacted on business and revenue flow for State Owned Enterprises. Specific to the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure (MOICI), the consultancy for the formulation of the ICT for Development Master Plan scheduled for completion by end-June, 2020 is still pending. Also, the Government Wide Area Network Project, which is intended to provide a reliable platform for intra-government communications, was scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2020. This important project is now set for completion by December, 2020.

As part of regional efforts to strengthen Cyber Security, the Ministry has secured funds from the ECOWAS Commission and the Organized Crime West Africa Response on Cyber Crime to roll out a Digital Lab for The Gambia Police Force. Within the country, The Gambia Computer Incidence Response Team has been established to deal with internal Cyber Security related threats. The migration from Analogue to Digital broadcasting also had to be halted after the successful launch of the first phase in February, 2020. This hindered the completion of the project in the second quarter of 2020. Turning attention to GAMTEL, implementation of their 'Turn-Around' Strategy has encountered delays, thus constraining the company's revenue flow. By the same token, GAMCEL's revenue marked a significant decline in the first quarter of 2020. This has affected efforts to upgrade Gamcel's network to 4G. Although works are

ongoing, completion of this project is now re-scheduled for the first quarter of 2021, instead of December, 2020.

GAMPOST also experienced significant revenue decline from sale of stamps. In addition, commissions received from Post Money Transfer have plunged, as these depend largely on remittances from the Diaspora. This meant that GAMPOST had to struggle with meeting their operational costs, including the payment of salaries. However, Government intervention through the Supplementary Appropriation Bill has helped to maintain salary payments. The Gambia Printing and Publishing Corporation has reported similar programme implementation delays and insufficient supply of printing materials from suppliers. Added to these challenges are other operational setbacks and significant loss of revenue.

In spite of the challenges, the Ministry of Information and Communication Infrastructure succeeded in validating several components of the ICT for Development Master Plan; the Cyber Security and Broadband Policies and their accompanying strategies, as well as components of the ICT for Development Policy. To strengthen the e-government programme, the Ministry has successfully completed works on the second phase of the project on fibre to Ministries, Departments and Agencies. This is another important initiative to eventually establish a single Government Wide Area Network. The arrangements include enhancing digital solutions for COVID-19 response and mitigation through the Digital Health Response Mechanism.

Finally, with support from the World Bank, work is in progress to migrate from the e-government Data Centre to the Private Cloud Data Centre of the National Broadband Network.

❖ **Women, Children and Social Welfare**

Madam Speaker, the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare has embarked on using integrated approaches and establishing new solutions to advance gender equity and equality; reinforce social protection systems; promote child protection; and, importantly, create social safety nets for persons with disabilities. The pandemic has certainly impacted negatively on the sector's projects and programmes, resulting in low implementation rates. In this connection, with support from the UN Agencies, the Ministry conducted a study on the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 on women and

girls. The key findings indicate that some women are at risk of facing threats to their safety and freedom rights due to movement restrictions, thus increasing their confinement with their abusers. The pandemic also threatens access to reproductive and child health care. As the number of COVID-19 cases continues to increase, concerns are growing about the pandemic's immediate and long-term effects on certain demographics, especially on women, children, the youth and unskilled workers.

Madam Speaker, in partnership with the Office of the First Lady, the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare joined the battle against the pandemic by providing sanitary items and rice to eight (8) markets, two hundred (200) communities, The Gambia Prisons Department, TANKA TANKA, fifty-one (51) Quranic Learning Centres (Majalis) and The Gambia Federation for Persons with Disabilities. 6. In progress is the construction of a solar-powered borehole for the Bakoteh Shelter for Children and the Elderly, implemented through the "PAPEV Project" and under the purview of the Ministry.

As this is a new Ministry, allow me to observe that the staff successfully provided food items to one thousand (1,000) vulnerable households with children in the West Coast, North Bank and Central River Regions. To crown it all, they were able to reunite one hundred and forty-six (146) children from Senegal with their families in The Gambia.

❖ **Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery**

Madam Speaker, the recently restructured Department of Strategic Policy and Delivery (DSPD), under the Office of The President, is the technical arm of the office. It became fully operational in October 2019, and provides inputs and advice for the formulation and analysis of public policies and programmes. It also works towards speeding up and coordinating delivery of quality projects for the citizenry. Within this short span of time, the DSPD mooted and supported the creation of the National Economic Council, which I chair, and participates in the quarterly National Business Council meetings chaired by Her Excellency, the Vice President. The Business Council provides a platform for dialogue between Government and the Private Sector.

Acting on behalf of my Office, the DSPD is the interface between my government and the United Nations System pertaining to interventions under the UN-Development Assistance Framework, ending 2021. Together with UNDP, the Department initiated

the Programme for Accelerated Community Development. This is an articulation and intervention of the four Presidential priorities of Access to Potable water, Rural Access Roads, Rural electrification and Food security support, entailing provision of labour-saving machines. The project strives to promote inclusive development by bringing basic socio-economic services to the rural population, especially those in hard-to-reach communities. It is a Five Million US-Dollar (US \$ 5 Million) Project. The financing agreement was signed with UNDP in April, 2020 to formally kick-start implementation. The Policy Analysis Unit of the Department provides strategic support to MDAs in the area of Public Policy formulation, and gives technical support to Cabinet and the National Covid19 Committee on Government's strategic response to the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, the DSPD has launched two Flagship Publications to share analytical reports and policy notes with MDAs and Development Partners. The overarching goal for this initiative is to promote evidence-based, effective and transparent policy development and application. These aside, the Department supports data analysis exercises and generation of simulation models to inform decision-making. Such support contributed to the adoption of suitable responses, among a range of other options, in the fight against COVID-19 in the country. Recently, the Department was tasked to work with The Gambia OIC Secretariat to appraise the country's state of preparedness and progress towards hosting the 2022 OIC Summit and to identify the existing financing gaps requiring attention. We await the report on this exercise.

❖ **Concluding Remarks**

Madam Speaker, over the past three years, my government has systematically addressed the unfavourable state of affairs we found in the country when we came into office. We have productively reconnected The Gambia with the global community. In the process, we have paid undivided attention on infrastructure development, energy, governance and legal matters, institutional reform and strengthening, amid a strong determination to guarantee and sustain lives and livelihoods. 2020 and 2021 would have seen the boosting of all these achievements and wrapping up of the NDP programmes and activities in readiness for the Third Republic. Unfortunately, these are moments of uncertainty, as we cannot predict how the pandemic will evolve; but we hope for revival after this bitter experience. Meanwhile, the lessons to learn from this pandemic are clear. It has brought about a new social order that calls for

discipline, collective action, determination and accepting reality as it is. The indication is that we are in a health, economic and social crisis that will linger on into the future, and a situation that we may have to live with. It poses challenges to contend with, not only with resources, but also with all the courage and energy we can muster. In the face of all these, my government maintains that survival, lives and livelihoods come first. In other words, we rank the people higher than anything else. I encourage all Gambians to remain calm, focused and dedicated to making a positive difference in the welfare of the nation. These are moments to build on our resilience in order to achieve our noble aspirations.

Like other nations, the pandemic has struck the country. Lives have been lost, and social life is no longer what it used to be. There are fears and concerns about our wellbeing, and most families are worried about the survival chances of their dear ones, especially the elderly and other vulnerable groups. I convey heartfelt condolences to all the bereaved families, and I pray that all the departed souls rest in eternal peace. We must accept that we need to be more mindful of what we do, where we go and how we behave and interact. The situation calls for transforming our fears and faith into strength, protecting ourselves with all the precautionary measures and resolutions, while hoping for better days ahead. With the wisdom that has come from this immense crisis, let us unite closely and contribute productively to our wellbeing in our various ways: as individuals, organisations and institutions, and as a government, a nation and a people bound by a common heritage. The pandemic has taught us the need to cultivate a new culture of cleanliness, a new social order of living in harmony as human beings, a new political vision of working together and a new way of embracing solidarity. For our collective safety and survival, let us redefine our roles and development paths against the realities of the times. As we meet here, millions of people have already been infected with the coronavirus; hundreds of thousands have already died, and more are dying as a result of COVID-19.

Madam Speaker, in spite of this dim picture, we will not be distracted, nor shall we relent. The pandemic will neither undermine our vision, nor the resolve to direct our energies and resources for the development and welfare of the Gambian citizens. For us, lives, rights and happiness for every human being matter above any other agenda. As we paddle on, Madam Speaker, we cannot allow our attention and energy to be

diverted to issues that have no cultural or religious value, nor any significance to contribute to the advancement of our nation. I would like to draw the curtain on recent debates about the rights of people with different sexual orientations. Let me emphasise that our partnership with our development partners is based purely on mutual respect for the advancement of our people.

At this juncture, let me reiterate my appreciation and gratitude to the CRC for submitting the draft Constitution within the specified timeframe. The draft copy has gone through the required processes, and was tabled recently by this August Assembly to allow for the remaining phases of finalising and adopting the new Constitution. Madam Speaker, I assure all Gambians that my government is determined that the general elections will be conducted in 2021, as scheduled. My conviction is that, whatever our position or belief may be, we should always concede to the national interest, and forego selfishness.

On behalf of the entire nation, I thank all civil and public servants, the security service personnel, all Commission members, friendly nations, development partners, organisations, groups and individuals, both within the country and outside, as well as all Gambians for their contribution to our successes during the past year. We are in no less measure grateful to all those who continue to support us, especially in sustaining our fight against the coronavirus.

Madam Speaker, Honourable Members of this August Assembly, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish this August Assembly very fruitful deliberations during the year, and I pray that whatever we do, may it be in the best interest of the nation. With these remarks, I pray that Allah bless us, guide us and protect us all. I thank you for your attention.

THE SPEAKER: Thank you very much Your Excellency. Any seconder?

HON. OUSMAN TOURAY [SABACH SANJAL]: Madam Speaker, I rise to second the motion.

THE SPEAKER: It has been moved and seconded that this August Assembly do consider the Motion on the State of the Nation Address delivered by His Excellency, the President of the Republic?

[Question Put and Agreed to]

Hon. Members, the consideration and debate proper on the Motion so tabled will now be adjourned until Monday 21st September, 2020, to give Hon. Members ample time to digest the said Address. But before I adjourn this sitting, please allow me to, on behalf of both sides of the august Assembly and indeed on my own behalf, thank His Excellency, the President of the Republic, for his well delivered State of the Nation Address. Of course, it is a statutory duty but you will all agree with me that the address deserves commendation for the manner in which it was delivered.

The Address has indeed outlined the Condition of The Gambia, the Policies of the Government and the Administration of the State.

This Assembly will therefore in the next few days reflect and debate on the policy statement so well delivered here in this august Assembly. The statement will also give Hon. Members an opportunity to reflect on the achievements and challenges we face as a Nation and the urgent need for national unity, peace and stability especially amid Covid-19 as stated by the President.

As the peoples' Representatives, we are charged to do our best to ensure that the policies and programmes outlined in His Excellency's Address are thoroughly scrutinised and debated with due diligence.

It is also important for us to have a clear understanding of the Government's policies, development programmes and aspirations. This will provide the National Assembly and its various Committees with tools necessary to perform its legislative scrutiny and oversight functions.

On that note, Mr. President, I thank you once more for addressing this Assembly. In the same vein, I wish to express thanks and gratitude to:

- Your Excellency, The Vice President of the Republic;
- Your Excellencies, Former Vice-Presidents;
- My Lord, the Chief Justice of The Gambia
- Hon. Members of this august Assembly;
- Hon. Ministers herein present;

- Lord Mayors and Regional Governors;
- Leaders of Political Parties;
- Service Chiefs;
- Venerable Religious Leaders;
- The Press and;
- All Distinguished Invited Guests, for gracing this solemn occasion in the calendar of the National Assembly.

By extension, on behalf of both sides of the august Assembly, I also wish to register our gratitude to all Gambians (our electorates) both within and in the Diaspora for the support and collaboration in our collective drive towards Nation building.

To my Hon. Colleagues of the National Assembly, I want to reiterate that Nation building is an enormous task and as a key stakeholder in this process, I pray that our deeds and actions be guided by justice and conscience towards the common good of all.

May I also thank the Hon. Deputy Speaker, Hon Members, the Office of the Clerk, the Taskforce and all those who in their various ways contributed immensely towards making this day a success. I pray that Allah (SWT) blesses and guides us all.

Before I put the question, may I kindly remind all guests to remain seated to allow His Excellency, the President to take leave of the Chambers, to be followed by the Vice-Presidents and others.

On that note, I would now put the question.

[Question Proposed, Put and Agreed to]

[That this august Assembly stands adjourned until Monday 21st September, 2020 at 10:00am]

ADJOURNMENT